DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 528 FL 023 901

AUTHOR Mufwene, Salikoko S.
TITLE Pragmatics of Elusive Languages.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 22p.; For complete volume, see FL 023 890.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Pragmatics and Language Learning; v3 p162-181 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Dialects; Contrastive Linguistics; Creoles; *Language Classification; Language Patterns; Language Research; *Language Variation; Linguistic Theory; *Pragmatics; *Regional Dialects; Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS African Americans; Language Contact

ABSTRACT

The definition of and distinction between two variations of American English, African American English Vernacular (AAEV) and Gullah, the American creole spoken on the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, are discussed. It is argued that while these and other varieties are defined typically by their basilects, the reality encountered in the field is that of variable, non-monolithic systems characterized as "mesolectal," with variable morphosyntactic and semantic kinship to the lexifier and substantial structural heterogeneity and formal alternatives for the same functions. These languages are termed "elusive." When the "code" is not clearly identifiable, it is difficult to apply pragmatics. Patterns of usage of AAEV and Gullah are examined from this perspective and by comparison with usage patterns in other regions. The hypothesis that this is an example of code-mixing is examined and rejected. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 395 528

Pragmatics of Elusive Languages

Salikoko S. Mufwene

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lawrence F Bouton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL-023901

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Pragmatics and Language Learning
Monograph Series, Vol. 3, 1992

Pragmatics of Elusive Languages

Salikoko S. Mufwene

The term "pragmatics" is used in this paper insofar as it may subsume the ethnography of communication, especially in discussing factors such as identity of the code qua language variety[1] and of the speakers. This position is suggested particularly by the characterization of the field's subject matter as the "relation of signs to (their) interpreters" and "the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs" (Morris 1938: 6 & 108, cited by, e.g., Levinson 1983: 1-2 and Horn 1988: 116). I am concerned primarily with the sociological aspect of the discipline, focusing on the identity of the "code."

Since I do not discuss aspects of what has been commonly characterized as "language use" relative either to context[2] or to the psychological disposition of the speaker (e.g., Levinson 1983, Green 1989), this paper may be perceived as dealing with the periphery of pragmatics.[3] Such a position is justified only if it is assumed that the identity of the code is generally unequivocal. One of the points of this paper is that there are several cases where the code is not clearly identifiable. Unless some assumptions about language are abandoned, for instance, that it is a monolithic system (cf. Mufwene 1991a), pragmatics as the study of signs relative to their interpreters is hard to apply to such cases.

My discussion focuses on the African American English vernacular (AAEV) and Gullah (the American creole spoken on the coast of Georgia and South Carolina). Attempting sometimes to generalize, I refer in passing to particularly Jamaican and Guyanese Creoles. All these language varieties have been defined typically by their basilects, i.e., those varieties projected by creolists to contain the maximum number of morphosyntactic and semantic features that distinguish them from their lexifiers. However, the reality that the field investigator is usually confronted with is that of variable, nonmonolithic systems safely characterized by creolists as "mesolectal."[4] They show variable morphosyntactic and semantic kinship to the lexifier and display a lot of structural heterogeneity and formal alternatives for the same functions, with some of the alternatives being like those found in the lexifier and others the same as in the putative basilect. For the investigator who assumes the basilect to have ever existed and associates the mesolectal reality with decreolization (as claimed by, e.g., DeCamp 1971 and Bickerton 1973 but disputed by, e.g., Mufwene 1987, 1991b, 1991d and Lalla and D'Costa 1990), there are definitely cases where it cannot be decided whether or not AAEV or Gullah, as opposed to English, is being spoken. It is on account of such uncertainties, too numerous to be ignored, that the adjective "elusive" is predicated of these language varieties in this paper. I argue at the end that the adjective can also be predicated of other language varieties.

The question addressed here does not boil down to a simple matter of boundary indeterminacy. It is not really that of where AAEV or Gullah ends and its lexi-

fier or acrolect begins.[5] It is rather that of whether the absence of some basilectal features, or their alternation with some features of the lexifier suggests code-mixing (i.e., discourse-contained dilution of the creole or AAEV with the acrolect or lexifier) or simply decreolization (i.e., an ongoing systematic departure from the basilect toward the acrolect). This question dates back from the time DeCamp (1971) presented the Jamaican Creole variation data in Table 1, explained below in his own words:

> As a demonstration, Table 1 presents a `continuum' consisting of seven speakers, each of which differs from the other six by one or more of six features. This mini-continuum is not hypothetical. The seven informants are selected from those interviewed in my survey of 142 Jamaican communities, and the six features are among the many which define the continuum of Jamaican English. The feature [+A] indicates habitual use of the word *child*; [-A] indicates use of *pikni* or *pikini* in equivalent contexts. [+D] indicates a phonological contrast in such pairs as *den/then*; [-D] indicates a lack of this contrast. [+F] indicates the use of *didn't* in negative past-tense constructions, [-F] the use of various alternatives such as *no ben, no did* (DeCamp 1973: 355).[6]

TABLE 1

Features			Speakers					
+A *child*	-A *pikni*		1. +A	+B	+C	-D	+E	+F
+B *eat*	-B *nyam*		2. -A	+B	-C	-D	+E	+F
+C /θ ~ t/	-C /t/		3. -A	+B	-C	-D	-E	-F
+D /ð ~ d/	-D /d/		4. -A	-B	-C	-D	-E	-F
+E *granny*	-E *nana*		5. +A	+B	+C	+D	+E	+F[7]
+F *didn't*	-F *no ben*		6. +A	+B	-C	-D	+E	+F
			7. -A	+B	-C	-D	+E	-F

DeCamp interpreted this continuum as suggesting decreolization. This approach was later on applied to Guyanese Creole by Bickerton (1973), focusing on the complementizer, on the copula and copula-like items, and on the third person singular pronominal forms as grammatical variables. He reached the same conclusion as DeCamp, proposing an implicational scale that has been questioned by Romaine (1982), Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), and recently by Winford (1990).[8] Applied to Gullah's variation data such as below, one might also assume (mistakenly as far as I am concerned -- see below) that this language is decreolizing:

(1)a. *haʷ yi/yu də du?* 'How are you doing?'
how you DURATIVE do
b. *haʷ yi/yu də dum?*
c. ha: yi dum

(2)a. *wɛ yu dəz wək?* 'Where do you work?'
where you HABIT work
b. *wɛ yu də wək?* [extension of the durative for habits]
c. *wɛ yu wəkɪn?* [same as (2b)]
d. *wɛ yu wək?*

(3)a. *ʌ tɛl ʌm (fə) dõ kʌm* 'I told him/her not to come.'
b. *ʌ tɛl ši (fə) dõ kʌm* 'I told her not to come.

Since DeCamp (1971) it has generally been assumed that decreolization has been facilitated by the coexistence of the creole with its lexifier and by socioeconomic mobility (due in part to mass education), which has given creole speakers more and more exposure to the acrolect and more and more motivation and opportunity to acquire it in an apparently replacive manner. However, while the hypothesis has found support in inter-individual variation (one interpretation of the continuum), its weakest part, based on the mistaken assumption of a monolithic system, has lain in intra-individual variation. The same speaker may alternate freely between two or more forms or constructions in the same speech event, talking to the same addressee and about the same topic. For instance, the subjective pronoun *ši* may be coindexed in the same utterance with the possessive *hi*, as in *ši gɔn fə si hibʌbə* `she went/has gone to see her brother'.

To further illustrate intra-individual variation, two examples from my early field work may be cited here. In the first, an informant identified here only as MI reacted to somebody's comment with *βɛrɪ βɛl* `very well.'[9] About a minute later MI was saying /vɛrɪ wɛl/ , suggesting either that both productions are free variants or that the former alternative is a salient feature (as used by Trudgill 1986) that she may not have wanted to be stigmatized with in my presence. However, regarding the second interpretation, one must ask why she did not try to conceal so many other features in her speech that are equally salient.[10]

The second example is that of a ninety-year-old man who was recounting to me his frustration about getting his paycheck from one of his foremen when he used to work and his persistence in waiting for his pay. In the same speech event he said (4a) first and later (4b), which suggests that he was not trying to sound more English-like. I have added alternative (4c) also because it is a common construction problem, even though he did not use it.

(4)a. *ʌ wɔ̃n ʌm fə pɛ̃ mi mi mʌnɪ* (MG)
I want him to pay me my money.
b. *ʌ wɔ̃ fə hi pɛ̃ mi mi mʌnɪ* (MG)
c. *ʌ wɔ̃ hi pɛ̃ mi mi mʌnɪ*

There is in fact another alternative, presented separately in (5) simply because it is less common; I obtained it only by elicitation:

(5) *ʌ wɔ̃ fə hi fə pɛ̃ mi mi mʌnɪ*

It is disputable whether some of the alternatives in examples (1-4) suggest decreolization at all. Nonetheless, these instances of intra-individual variation have been interpreted in the same way as inter-individual variation, i.e., as reflecting change in progress. The hypothesis remains questionable in the absence of diachronic evidence. It is more questionable when one realizes that even standard varieties of languages such as English offer a certain amount of stable variation that suggests no change in progress. A case in point is relative clauses, which, since the Old English days, have been introduced alternatively with relative pronouns or a complementizer. Although it might be argued that relative clauses starting with relative pronouns are somewhat restricted to written style, there is in this style a certain amount of inter-individual variation regarding restrictive relative clauses with *which* and alternatives with *that*. There are speakers who use *that* only in those cases where *which* may be used and there others for whom such a constraint does not apply; they use it even when the head noun refers to a human, as in *the lady that we just met.*[11]

Another example may be cited from delimiting nouns in number and countability. Some American traffic signs vary in this respect from state to state. For instance, it is more typical to read *Watch for falling rock* in West Virginia than in Pennsylvania, where the typical sign is *Watch for falling rocks*. *Truck crossing* is how the sign reads in South Carolina, whereas in Georgia it is *Trucks entering highway*. Georgia is somewhat inconsistent because it also has a sign that says *Car entering road*. Louisiana and Mississippi have a sign that reads *Bridge may ice in cold weather* (more or less like Georgia with one that reads *Bridge may ice in winter*), while North Carolina's sign says *Bridges may be icy*.

The alternation between individuated indefinite plural delimitation for generic reference and nonindividuated delimitation for reference to mass may also be observed in colloquial English in constructions such as *Jane likes fruit/fruits* and *she eats cake/cakes* and *admission/admissions office*, with the slight semantic distinctions between the alternates often overlooked by the relevant speakers.

The point of invoking these English examples is primarily to show that free variation exists everywhere which need not be associated with change. The hasty association of variation with decreolization in creole studies simply begs the question most of the time. Few creolists have seen in such creole variation something other than change. Particularly worth citing in connection with this are Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985). Capitalizing on individual speakers, they interpret their variable linguistic choices as "a series of *acts of identity* in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (14). They argue that

> To the extent that it does not derive from factors inherent in the linguistic systems -- such as the assimilation of sounds to one another in certain environments -- such variability may be ascribed to us fluctuating in imitating the usage of the group or groups with which we wish to identify; it is not necessarily a symptom of change in the `language' (199).

Language itself is presented in the book as an elusive, a not "clearly-definable external object" (247). To the extent that speakers command a range of variable features, the selections are indicative of the identities they wish to assume based on presumably their stereotypes of linguistic behavior in the community.

For those that had done field research on stigmatized language varieties, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's interpretation has some appeal, especially since some will not speak AAEV or Gullah (naturally) before outsiders to their communities. I can testify to this with one of my guides on Johns and Wadmalaw Islands in South Carolina. The longer we worked together (over several months) the more comfortable she felt about speaking Gullah and the more basilectal forms she used in her speech not with me but with the informants.

In a way, my guide's linguistic adjustment is true even of informants who have not learned much English and may be characterized as speaking only creole: talking to the outsider, either they talk less or their speech becomes somewhat distant from the putative basilect. In the case of speech modification, the following question must certainly be addressed: is the speech adjustment simply a matter of "acts of identity" or is it rather, or also, a matter of accommodating the outsider, making sure that they can understand?

Here too, analogies are not lacking in English. In comparison to my guide and other Gullah or AAEV speakers, one might cite, for instance, educated Southerners in the USA who conceal their salient southern features when interacting with non-Southerners (especially outside the South). One might also invoke cases where native speakers of any language naturally accommodate foreigners in omitting from their speech some forms and idioms not necessarily because they are not standard but simply because they want conversation to be more successful. In the latter case, it is implausible to invoke "act of identity," rather than simple accommodation to the addressee, to account for speech variation. That is, though "act of identity" is undoubtedly a valid explanation in many cases where speakers adjust their speech, it does not apply universally and probably not to all instances where the language varieties claimed to be elusive here vary in the direction of the acrolect.

Given that most native speakers vary their speech, the following questions arise: Does the fact that African Americans who are stereotypically associated with AAEV or Gullah communicate among themselves necessarily predetermine their discourse chunks as AAEV or Gullah? Does the fact of using forms and constructions that are English-like necessarily make one's speech acts less AAEV or Gullah? When are linguists justified in ruling out some texts as non-AAEV or non-Gullah?

Theoretically the answer to the first question is negative, as a variety of circumstances may preclude the option of using the native variety. However, if we focus on AAEV or Gullah in the American ethnographic setting, it may become clear why the answer to the other two questions is not clearcut. The lexical sources of both language varieties, which are held in low status, are overwhelmingly English. The vast majority of their native speakers think they speak English, except that they sound different from other Americans.[12] To fully grasp the significance of these observations, one must break with the tradition (shared by many creolists) in which AAEV and Gullah have been compared typically and misguidedly with stan-

dard English, instead of their nonstandard counterparts. A close comparison of grammatical features will reveal that several and possibly the majority of them can be traced at least in form to some nonstandard variety of English under conditions of selection discussed in Mufwene (1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991c) against Bickerton (1981, 1984, 1989) and in partial support of proponents of both the superstrate and substrate hypotheses.[13]

Given what native speakers think of their language varieties in relation to their lexifier, or more accurately, the American varieties that AAEV and Gullah developed concomitantly with, what particular proportion of the features will make a discourse chunk by an African American Gullah or AAEV? Or should we go by the intention of the speaker, especially in dealing with the educated speakers, in order to determine whether or not Gullah or AAEV is being spoken? For instance, take the case of my guide EL in the texts below, which varies from setting to setting.[14] The reader should keep in mind that the norm, and probably what AAEV, Gullah, and their Caribbean kin really consist of, is what creolists have characterized as mesolectal.[15]

Text A (13 July 1986)

EL Sali?
SM Yeah!
EL I know you gonna have a little bit with me, aren't you, or you aint?
SM Well, actually, I ate before coming, and...
EL You did?
SM and I'm afraid that if I eat some more, I'm going to sleep.
EL You gonna fall asleep?
SM Yeah.
EL What time you got?
SM It's two forty-five.
EL Oh God, I got to go pick up my little girl instead of bring her over here. My mother-in-law got them.
GB Oh, you have to go git dem chirrin?
EL And bring um over here, cause she suppose to be, we suppose to be going back to church at four, but I need to go on and git um.
GB Well, you ga go on en bring um back over here?
EL I'm gonna bing [`bring'] um over here.
GB When?
EL Right now, I going pick um up right now.
GB Well, wha' time you going to church?
EL At four-thirty.
GB Oh, you ga bring them here now.
EL Huhn [hʌ̃]! I gwine get um, my mother-in-law might got suppin ['something'] to do.
GB You don't wear out e patient.
EL Then I'm coming back. Yeah, then I'm coming back.

GB De macaroni aint done yet?
EL No, uhn uhn [ɐ̃ʔɐ̃]! The macaroni aint done. So by d' time I come back, it should be done, I got it on real low. Man, it was too hot, I would a done been finish, but it's just too hot.
GB You go ahead if dem other things burnin, den I'll chat with you. I can't talk da [dɵ] name now, uhn, because dese things here bother me.
EL Why not? You scared dat thing [`tape recorder']?
GB E in my name, but dem people might LAUGHTER!
EL Huhn?
GB Hold it, I say cause you bring one dem thing back fuh [fə] me in a minute en I'll chat with you.
EL One a wha? Wha? Bring one back fuh you?
GB Yeah.
EL You done drink dat one I gee [`gave'] you?
GB Dat soda, I done drink dat soda so long till e aint funny. I been a.
EL LAUGHTER!
GB You laugh right dey, I aint laughin with you

Text B (20 December 1986)

FR ...sixteen head now... en everyone livin...
PR yeah
EL Sixteen!
FR Sixteen...
EL En all livin!?
FR Yes, ma'am.
PR Das da secon' one deh.
EL I know some of your sister... one o' your sister en me went to college together... You got a sister name uhn [ɐ̃]... J___M___?
PR Yes-sir... nuff of em
GUEST: SPEECH OVERLAP/CANNOT TELL
FR Yeah... das righ'...
EL We went to Tennessee... to college together...
FR Ohoh, OK, yeah
PR SPEECH OVERLAP
GUEST: think she home now, Uh think.
EL She home now?
PR She nice... she ha' nine in school one time...
EL Waay! Hear da' Salikoko! He mama en daddy had nine head o'children in school one time!
FR Margaret mus' ha' more chirun en da' in school one time, aini?
EL Greaaat Gosh!
PR Had nine in school one time... yeah...
EL How you `member all dem children name?... I got three... en I can hardly remember deh name sometime LAUGHTER

FR Bu... de mother might but de daddy say he can't remember... he kehn [kɛ̃ː]keep with de names, either [aila]
PR He kehn... he kehn keep up people's names... say, Shu'! I kehn 'member all dem drat chillen name.
EL Is your mother still alive?
FR Yeah, e mother is Sarah sister... Patty mother-in-law sister...
EL For real?
FR Yes, ma'am.
EL I didn know deh were da' close...
PR Yeah, yeah, see, ain but two o'dem: S___ en Margaret [maːgri]...
FR That's righ'...S___ en Margaret.
PR da's raigh'... dat...da's Margaret daughter deh... en Sandy... Sandy mama is de nex' sister to her...
EL Well, sir!
FR & GUEST: Dat's right.
PR Da's righ', yes, ma'am.
EL I did not know... I sure learn somet'n ere, didn I? But I know all your sister en brother...
FR Hmmhm
PR Yes, SPEECH OVERLAP
EL not all, but you know... at 1... some o'dem... I know at least'... L___ Mack is your brother, too, aini'?
FR Yeah.
PR Hmhm, yeah.
EL en O___?...
GUEST: Hm
PR Huhnuhn [hɐ̃hɐ̃ː]
EL en H___?...
PR Yeah
GUEST: All o' dem
EL en we all... see deh?...
PR all o' dem... all o' dem, yeah.
EL we ain no stranger... we ain no stranger.
FR Small world!
PR Sixteen head o' dem... honey.., Reveren J___ M___ he been apreachin when he sixteen years ol'... 'fore he finish school... yeah... 'fore he finish high school he been a preach
GUEST: Ten sisters en six bon [bɐ̃]... six broders...
EL Six...
PR Hmhm, six broders en ten sister...
EL Greaaat Gosh!
FR Yes, ma'am.
PR Hmhm, only one dead... yes-sir... growin strong...
EL en all living!
PR Yeah, huhnhuhn... yeah.

FR everyone...
EL That's a blessin...
FR so far so good...

Text C (28 November 1987)

JR And I been deh tell e two [`they both'], come talk bout water, huh... dem berry [`bury'] da boy in water.
EL Deh bury [`buried'] him in water? I surprise [`I'm surprised'] deh do [`did'] that because deh ain suppose to do that you know! If that thing can come right back up, up of the water... out the ground.
JR INAUDIBLE but a vault [wɔlt] don' rise.
EL Oh.
JR But a ordinary box e rise.
EL Oh, e had a vault... had um in a vault.
JR Richard body berry in a vault.
EL For real?
JR Ah huhn.
EL Well Dillon put em down good then, inni?
JR Yeah.
EL Cause Lilly bury [`was buried'] in a vault too.
JR Yeah, e berry long side um.
EL Oh.
JR INAUDIBLE in the yahd deday [`today'] was over right by da pump and da [də] damn bucket.
EL Uhn huhn.
JR Now da... now da... ching [`thing'] weh I see... the ching duh [də] change.
EL Uhn huhn.
JR They like if you belong to the church, then I don't belong to the church and I die, the preacher put you right in the church too.
EL That's right. Long time ago e ain did dat.
JR No.
EL E ain... e ain couldn't do dat.
JR E wouldn do it.
EL But now e put you right in the church too.
JR Right.
EL Right in the church too, so now you ain got to belong, long as your family go and your family pay...
JR that's it
EL ...go in right deh.
JR Well, I pay my duty.
EL I know dat.
JR Buster duh mah leader.
EL Hm hm

JR You know im, inni?
EL Oh yeah... Buster _____?
JR Yeah.
EL I know Buster good... I ain know [`didn't know'] Buster bin [`was'] your leader, you know... I thought Neen bin your leader.
JR Mm mm. Laura en... en.. en Lilly was Neen leader.
EL Hm hm.
JR But... Buster duh mah leader.
EL Oh, oh, I didn't know dat. I always... cause uhn... Lilly _____ always.. Neen always come and check on you and see bout you... bring you thing [`things']
JR Yeah, I bin ou' deh yestehdeh.
EL Hm hm
JR I all time care bou' Neen.
EL Hm hm
JR En den when my cousin dead... bury deh... deh... but Uh couldn't duh deh...
EL Who?
HR ...in Walterboro.
EL Oh! in Walterboro?
JR Yeah. You ain know Harry, inni?
EL No, no.
JR Harry _____, dat duh Neen cousin.
EL Yeah, dat's right cause all dem NAME is Neen cousin.

In these recordings EL adjusts her phonology only slightly, making it little different from that of the informants. The question of what role phonological evidence plays in the distinction of language varieties that are closely related morphosyntactically remains open. EL's adjustment seems more evident in the selection of grammatical constructions than in the phonology. Based on the above texts, should speech such as hers whose quality varies in a gradient be treated sometimes as English and at other times as Gullah? Should the identity of the code be cased on the speaker's intention and/or the identity of the addressee?

Labov (1980: 379) makes an important distinction between the linguistic and symbolic definitions of language variety. The former corresponds to the academic stereotype of the variety whereas the latter amounts to what some readers might take EL's speech to be, i.e., the attempt to speak a particular variety without really meeting the linguistic definition of the variety. Note that according to this distinction a great deal of (semi-)creole speech would be symbolic, since it is mesolectal and thus diverges from the basilect that constitutes the stereotype (assuming that the basilect allows horizontal variation). The point is that, while it may be useful, the proposed distinction does not preempt the question of whether or not the linguistic definition of a language variety is an accurate one.

I have dwelt on the question of code identity because "act of identity" or any macro-pragmatic aspects of Gullah, of AAEV, or of any other creole cannot be

discussed without first of all being able to tell one code from the other, particularly in those ethnographic settings where a (semi-)creole coexists with its lexifier and shares several formal features with it.

The question of code identity is relevant also for a number of reasons and from a variety of perspectives. To begin with, if standard English is primarily a written variety, very few people communicate in it. Implicit comparison for determining whether or not a speaker is using AAEV, Gullah, or any creole must thus be with some variety of spoken English. If these (semi-)creole varieties have been lexified by nonstandard varieties, rather than with standard or educated colloquial varieties, as done in a great deal of the literature. If, as these observations suggest, there must be a gradient of relatedness from educated spoken English, through nonstandard English, to AAEV and Gullah, the question of boundary or critical features is a serious one, especially if mesolectal speech is the norm rather than the exception.

It must be recalled in connection with the above that the basilect is a theoretical construct projected on the basis of the maximum number of features not attested in the lexifier; no pure basilectal text has ever been cited to date in the literature (Mufwene 1987). According to the state of the art of creole genesis, the first diverging speech patterns to develop were those characterized to date as mesolectal; the (near-)basilectal ones developed later (Chaudenson 1979, 1988, Bickerton 1988, Baker 1990). As the colonial communities in which the (semi-) creoles developed were highly stratified and it seems to have been rewarding since the beginning of the colonial societies to be able to communicate in a lect close to the lexifier, speakers of the mesolect had no reason to abandon it in favor of the putative basilect. This is not to suggest that they could not learn (near-) basilectal speech. The best diachronic studies available (Rickford 1987, Lalla and D'Costa 1990) show that variation has always been characteristic of the speech communities using AAEV, Gullah, and other creoles. Given what has been observed about the putative basilect and given these other considerations, one of the questions that may be raised is whether it is not too arbitrary to base the identity of AAEV, Gullah, or any other creole on (almost) only those features that are not attested in the lexifier.

It has been suggested, recently by DeBose (1991), that code-switching or mixing may be involved in what is otherwise called mesolect. Speaking of AAEV and what he characterizes as "standard English," DeBose argues that "when marked features of the both systems co-occur in the same chunk of speech, it is usually possible to make a plausible case for one system being the matrix system with elements of the other system embedded in it" (2).[16] Determining which system functions as the matrix is presumably determined by whether features of English or AAEV predominate in the discourse.[17]

However, the question is whether or not any similarities obtain between African-American mesolectal speech and code-mixing. It is perhaps justified to assume that the analogy between the two kinds of speech is a tenuous one. There are indeed some differences. To begin with, the distinction between the codes involved is generally clearcut in the cases of code-mixing commonly discussed in the literature. Regarding both Zaire and Tanzania, for instance, the distinction is clear between,

on the one hand, French and Lingala (Bokamba 1989; Bokamba and Kamwangamalu 1987) and, on the other, English and Swahili (Myers-Scotton 1989a, 1989b, 1990). The languages have different lexical stocks and there are significant grammatical and phonological differences in their formal systems. The identification of the "matrix language" is consequently obvious. Such is not the case with Gullah and AAEV compared not with standard English but with the nonstandard varieties of English that they developed concomitantly with, especially in the southern part of the USA.

In both the cases of English/Swahili and French/Lingala code-mixing, the process usually presupposes a certain amount of command of English or French, as may be determined by the segment of the population that is more prone to the acrolect or High variety. Usually, the educated are the ones who code-mix the most. However, the "depth" of one's Gullah or AAEV (i.e., its closeness to the putative basilect) is not necessarily a correlate of one's level of education (despite DeCamp's 1971 conjecture for Jamaican Creole).[18]

As noted above, language in (semi-)creole settings has always been variable since the beginning. The new colonial speech varieties that developed first were close to the non-standard varieties of the lexifiers brought by the Europeans. Formal education is only one of the factors affecting variation in creole speech continua and its significance relative to other factors such as (ideological) pride in, or lack of shame with, the variety as well as the nature of the variety normally spoken at home. Lalla and D'Costa (1990) observe that even some people in higher strata of Jamaican plantation communities of the eighteenth century spoke varieties close to the putative basilect. To date, we may still notice near-basilectal varieties spoken by members of the Gullah community considered relatively affluent and by some youth, and upper mesolectal varieties (i.e., close to other varieties of English) spoken by the less educated. Similar sociolinguistic variation may be observed among speakers of AAEV. A case in point may be cited here: A week before the Conference at which this paper was presented, listening to a Baptist minister in Athens, Georgia, at an informal gathering with his congregation, I was surprised by his profuse use of multiple negation and constructions such as *many people that doedn' know*... Before this event, I had hardly heard such nonstandard features in his sermons, though several African American ministers often slip back to less standard speech when they get deeply involved in their sermons.

A third reason for not analogizing variation in African American speech with code-mixing lies in one of the pragmatic reasons for code-mixing. Very often speakers will code-mix only because they cannot retrieve the right terms or phrases in the "matrix language," due either to poor command or infrequent use of it. However, speech variation in Gullah or AAEV (with the range varying from speaker to speaker) is generally free and part of the norm, though in several cases it may also be interpreted as part of the process of accommodation to the outsider, as an attempt to prove one's dexterity in the stereotypical variety, or as an attempt to conceal the salient features.

On the other hand, these differences between speech variation in Gullah and AAEV and code-mixing in African are only part of the story. We might learn a few

things by considering other pragmatic reasons for code-mixing. Based on my experience with code-mixing in Zaire, languages are mixed sometimes by people who are not fluent in the "embedded language," when this is French, but resort to it only to pass as educated persons and thus impress the intended audience. There is a certain similarity between this ethnographic behavior and the attempts by some Gullah and AAEV speakers to conceal salient features of their varieties, even though it is debatable whether or not code-mixing in involved in the latter case.

There are also some ethnographic reasons why some people will use a "matrix language" that they may not command well: they may simply wish to express solidarity or be integrated. A similar reason may be attributed to those who speak Gullah or AAEV in public, even though they do not use it (regularly) at home. The depth of Gullah or AAEV may be compared with the amount of code-mixing in the African situations mentioned above. In both those cases where the proportion of items from the "embedded language" exceeds that of the items from the "matrix language"[19] and those where the intended Gullah, AAEV, or creole variety is hard to distinguish from varieties of its lexifier, the intention of the speaker appears to be an important factor. What Labov (1980: 379) calls "social construct" of a language variety may be an appropriate way of defining AAEV, Gullah, or any creole used like them. So we may conclude this part of the paper by observing that although code-mixing does not seem to be an adequate analogy to the variable mesolectal speech typical of Gullah and AAEV, the exercise of comparing the phenomena suggests a less stereotypical definition of these language varieties. This conclusion certainly applies also to Caribbean creoles that coexist with their lexifiers and have been claimed to be decreolizing.

If the above observations and conclusions are correct, we must treat the mesolect as the normal case and, following Fasold (1969: 773), reject the analogy to code-mixing, at least as involving separate codes. That is, rather than assuming competing systems, we may assume just one non-monolithic system with several competing rules and lexical items such that acts of identity may be determined by whether the selections made by a speaker on a particular occasion suggests of them a competence close to, or distant from, the lexifier. In other words, instead of defining Gullah, AAEV, and related creoles by their basilects, we may consider the alternative that their systems are so mixed, perhaps with more alternatives than is normally the case in non-creole situations, that it is misguided to define them mostly by features not attested in their lexifiers. The elusiveness of these varieties consists in determining with precision where they end and the next related variety starts.

I will conclude the paper by addressing two questions: 1) Why is identifying the code(s) in a speech relevant to pragmatics qua study of use of language? And, 2) Does what was discussed above apply to other languages? In response to the first question, the vast majority of pragmatic studies focus on specific construction types or forms in individual languages, regarding especially interpretations which they invite, implicate, or suggest. It is taken for granted that the constructions or items discussed belong to a well-defined language variety. In this paper, I have wished to show that the identity of the code is not always clear. In speech communities where variation is the norm, notions such as language variety X or Y are elusive.

The notion of "elusive code" discussed here might also apply to non-creole languages if linguists decided to make more specific the particular varieties which they discuss. For instance, the notion of standard English does not seem to be clearly defined. In studies of AAEV in particular, the notion is generally difficult to distinguish from the variety spoken by the white middle class. Sometimes, it has also been equated with network English, another elusive term. If we take it to be the kind of English used in the network news, we will be inaccurate in not admitting that we hear in the news several features that English 101 teachers discourage their students from using. In any case, the reality is that standard English does not amount just to written English and the boundary between it and educated colloquial English is not clearcut.

Another example is notions such as American Southern English, which may be an easy stereotype until one lives in the American South and is confronted with the heterogeneity of the dialect. The question is just compounded once notions such as British and American English are considered. Ultimately all language varieties are elusive if we consider them in relation to other varieties that are akin to them, especially those with which they coexist.

As stated at the outset, the relevance of this paper to a volume on pragmatics and language learning depends on whether or not the ethnography of communication is considered part of the field. I am wearing my creolist hat in this paper and I thought that my contribution to this volume should highlight what creole studies ought to be doing more of: exposing those neglected aspects of the study of language that deserve (more) attention. The elusiveness of the notion 'language variety X' is just one such aspect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Lawrence Bouton and Yamuna Kachru for inviting me to present this paper at the Fifth Annual International Conference on Pragamtics and Language Learning and to Charles DeBose for feedback on the Conference version. I am solely responsible for all the shortcomings.

THE AUTHOR

Salikoko S. Mufwene has just moved from the University of Georgia to the University of Chicago as Professor of linguistics. His recent work has been mostly on the semantics and morphosyntax of Gullah and Black English and on creole genesis.

NOTES

[1]Like "code," the term "language variety" is used in this paper to avoid taking a position about whether the African American English vernacular (also known as "Black English"), Gullah, and other "Atlantic creoles"discussed below are new languages or new dialects of their lexifiers. The term "code" is used here as neutrally as in the phrases "code-switching" and "code-mixing" rather than in the other

more restrictive sense proposed, rather inconsistently, by Hymes (1974: 59) for cases where "mutual intelligibility is in question."

[2]"Context" remains a vague term used to refer either to the non-linguistic setting of a speech event, or to what McCawley (1979) identifies as "contextual domain" (i.e., the context is being built by the discourse itself as it develops), or to the overall system of a language in terms of the options it makes available to a speaker (e.g., the choice between the verb *kill* and its paraphrase *cause to die* in English). For explicit discussions of context, see, e.g., Levinson (1983: x, 5, 10, 23, etc.).

[3]Considering the topics of several papers presented at the Conference (April 1991) and probably published in these proceedings, my uneasiness about whether or not this paper is suitable for a volume on pragmatics may seem unjustified to some readers. However, pragmatics was originally concerned with the interpretation of utterances regarding, e.g., their presuppositions and implicatures, and with the appropriateness of forms relative to their context of use. As a complement of semantics (see one of the alternative and apparently preferred definitions in Levinson 1983, e.g., p. 12), pragmatics may be assumed to exclude topics such as sexism in some languages and discourse structure, except where appropriateness is the primary concern. It is certainly safe to assert that there is no consensus among students of pragmatics regarding its subject matter(s). There are several surveys of pragmatics that do not cover much of what was discussed at the Conference. I am unable to cite a single reference book on pragmatics that addresses the question of code, even though Levinson (1983: 23) suggests that this may be a legitimiate concern of pragmatics. These considerations justify the caveat with which this paper begins. I assume that prior to associating code with some intended speaker-messages, it is necessary to address the question of code identity.

[4]A similar observation was made earlier by Beryl Bailey (1966) and endorsed by DeCamp (1971: 351). Rickford (1990: 160) rightly characterizes it as the norm rather than the exception.

[5]In creole studies, the term "acrolect" is normally used for the local standard variety of the lexifier. However, over the last two decades, the French creolist school, represented particularly by Chaudenson (1973, 1979, 1988), and defenders of the English-dialect origin of AAEV, e.g., D'Eloia (1973) and Schneider (1982, 1983, to appear), have argued more and more convincingly that the lexifiers of these new language varieties were metropolitan and colonial non-standard varieties and are not the acrolect. For some reason, it has usually been assumed that AAEV and its creole kin have been moving toward the acrolect, even when studies such as Labov (1972), Wolfram and Fasold (1974), and more recently Bailey and Maynor (1985) show similarities with White non-standard varieties, instead.

[6]DeCamp was mistaken in equating *didn't* with *no ben* and *no did*. The first is part of PAST/NONPAST absolute-relative tense system, whereas the basilectal ones are part of an ANTERIOR/NONANTERIOR relative tense system in which a NONANTERIOR form, the unmarked verb form, may also refer to the past. See, e.g., Bickerton (1975) and Mufwene (1983) for accounts of time reference in Guyanese and Jamaican Creoles.

17

[7]Mufwene (1987: 99) contends that "no pure basilectal speaker has yet been produced, [and] the pure basilect may never be shown to have existed" at any time in the history of the relevant creoles. This position is not necessariliy invalidated by DeCamp's analysis since it does not include a total inventory of the basilectal features of Jamaican Creole. As a matter of fact, Rickford (1980: 169-72) and Romaine (1988: 186-7) observe that actual creole speech data are not perfectly scalable. Rickford notes that, according to Bickerson (1973), "there was not any significant correlation between his [i.e., Bickerton's] scales for the copula and the pronominal subsystems of the Guyanese continuum" (169).

[8]Bickerson (1988) has now reversed his position, assuming like Chaudsenson (1979, 1988), that creolization did not start with basilectal varieties, but rather with mesolectal ones.

[9]Some creolists such as Jones-Jackson (1978, 1984) have given the impression that in basilectal Gullah / β / has substituted for /w/ and /v/. From what I have been able to determine to date, / β / has often alternated rather randomly with the other two, but it has never replaced them as a phoneme.

[10]Rickford (1980: 173) observes about one of his informants, Reefer, that his competence extended to almost the entire spectrum of singular pronoun variants. So much so, in fact, that the discontinuities in production on which implicational scaling depends were seriously called into question. He observes later that "with respect to ["the appropriate conditions for the use of these varieties in everyday life"], virtually *all* the respondents zeroed in on *nature of the addressee...*"

[11]One may also wish to mention, in connection with the alternation in relative clauses, variation between subordinate clauses introduced by *that* and those introduced by the null complementizer. Although their distribution may not be identical, it is hard to see any pattern of change or, I may add, any correlation with any pragmatic difference in the alternation.

[12]In the case of Gullah, some of its speakers are even shocked when one refers to their language variety as Gullah, suggesting it is not considered English. Several African American students are offended to hear the variety they grew up speaking called "Black English."

[13]Mufwene's alternative reduces the role of Universal Grammar to a body of constraints guaranteeing that this outcome of language contact does not violate any of its parametric specifications. It also determines which of the competing formal alternatives will find their way into the new language.

[14]For typographical convenience and easy reading for most readers, the text is presented in "eye dialect," following a common practice among American dialectologists. Only forms that are clearly different from mainstream varieties of English are written with typical distortions of the normal spelling. Forms between square brackets indicate the pronunciations of some of the distortions, unless they are also enclosed between single quotes, which indicate meaning. A side effect of this particular presentation is that it does not exaggerate the morphosyntactic distance between Gullah and English, though one must deplore the absence of prosodic features of all phonological ones. In the texts, the underlinings identify morphosyntactic peculiarities that I particularly wish to draw attention to.

[15]The stratification of speech in (semi)-creole communities into basilect, mesolect, and acrolect is indeed a concomitant of the decreolization hypothesis, with the term "mesolect" typically suggesting change toward the acrolect. However, I use the term here without reference to decreolization.

[16]In the oral version of the paper, DeBose attributes the model to Myers-Scotton, who also uses the terms "matrix" and "embedded language" (1989a, 1989b, 1990). Myers-Scotton has taken them from Joshi (1985). Competing with these terms are the alternatives "host" and "guest language" used by, e.g., Sridhar and Sridhar (1980), Bokamba (1989), and Bokamba and Kawangamalu (1987). I use "matrix" and "embedded" simply to remain consistent with DeBose.

[17]Fasold (1969: 773, n. 13) dismisses the alternative of code-switching, arguing that speakers of varieties similar to those discussed by DeBose use "language on the basis of a single grammar which shares many rules with Standard English, lacks others, and has still others which the standard dialect lacks."

[18]Interestingly, Lalla and D'Costa (1990) observe that even in the early days of Jamaican Creole, the linguistic continuum was not necessarily paralleled by the social stratification. What may be characterized for convenience as basilectal speech was heard among both the plantation aristocracy and the field slaves. The situation must have hardly been different for Gullah and AAEV.

[19]Bokamba (1989) observes that there are really no syntactic constraints on code-mixing.

REFERENCES

Bailey, Beryl Loftman (1966) *Jamaican Creole Syntax: A Transformational Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bailey, Guy and Nathalie Maynor (1985) The present tense of *be* in Southern Black folk speech. *American Speech*, 60, 195-213.

Baker, Philip (1990) Off target? Column. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 5, 107-19.

Bickerton, Derek (1973) On the nature of a creole continuum. *Language*, 49, 640-69.

Bickerton, Derek (1975) *Dynamics of a Creole System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bickerton, Derek (1981) *Roots of Language*. Ann Arbor: Karoma.

Bickerton, Derek (1984) The language bioprogram hypothesis. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7, 173-221.

Bickerton, Derek (1988) Creole languages and the bioprogram. In *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey. Volume II. Linguistic Theory: Extensions and Implications*. Edited by Frederick J. Newmeyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.268-84.

Bickerton, Derek (1989) The lexical learning hypotheis and the pidgin-creole cycle. In *Wheels within Wheels: Papers of the Duisburg Symposium on Pidgin and Creole Languages*. Edited by Martin Pütz & René Dirven. Frnakfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang. pp. 11-31.

Bokamba, Eyamba G. (1989) Are there syntactic constraints on code-mixing? *World Englishes*, 8, 277-92.

Bokamba, Eyamba G. and Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu (1987) The significance of code-mixing to linguistic theory: Evidence from Bantu languages. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 17, 21-43.

Chaudenson, Robert (1973) Pour une étude comparée des creolés et parlers francais d'outre-mer: survivance et innovation. *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 37, 342-371.

Chaudenson, Robert (1979) *Les créoles francais*. Fernand Nathan.

Chaudenson, Robert (1988) *Créoles et enseignement du francais*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

DeBose, Charles (1991) Systemic convergence in the African-American linguistic repertoire. Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Linguistics, Chicago.

DeCamp, David (1971) Toward a generative analysis of a post-creole speech continuum. In *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*. Edited by Dell Hymes. Cambridge University Press. pp. 349-70.

D'Eloia, Sarah G. (1973) Issues in the analysis of Negro nonstandard English: A review of J.L. Dillard's Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 7, 87-106.

Fasold, Ralph (1969) Tense and the form be in Black English. *Language*, 45, 763-76.

Green, Georgia (1989) *Pragmatics and Natural Language Understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Horn, Lawrence (1988) Pragmatic theory. In *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey. Vol. 1: Linguistic Theory: Foundations*. Edited by Frederick J. Newmeyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 113-45.

Hymes, Dell (1974) *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jones-Jackson, Patricia (1978) The Status of Gullah: An Investigation of Convergent Processes. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

Jones-Jackson, Patricia (1984) On decreolization and language death in Gullah. *Language* in Society 13.351-62.

Joshi, Aravind (1985) Processing of sentences with intra-sentential code-switching. In *Natural Language Parsing*. Edited by David Dowty, Lauri Karttunen, and Arnold Zwicky. New York: Academic Press. pp. 190-205.

Labov, William (1972) *Language in the Inner City: Studies in Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, William (1980) Is there a creole speech community? In *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies*, ed. by Albert Valdman and Arnold Highfield, 369-88. New York: Academic Press.

Lalla, Barbara and Jean D'Costa (1990) *Language in Exile: Three Hundred Years of Jamaican Creole*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Le Page, Robert B. and Andrée Tabouret-Keller (1985) *Acts of identity: Creole-based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, Stephen (1983) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCawley, James D. (1979) Presupposition and discourse. In *Pragmatics (Syntax and Semantics 11*). Edited by C.K. Oh & D. Dinneen. New York: Academic Press. pp. 371-88.

Morris, Charles (1938) Foundations of the theory of signs. In *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*. Edited by O. Neurath, R. Carnap, and C. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 77-138.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1982) Review of Pieter Muysken's *Generative studies on creole languages*. The American Anthropologist, 84, 186-8.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1983) Observations on time reference in Jamaican and Guyanese creoles. *English World-Wide*, 4, 199-229.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1987) Review article on Michael Montgomery and Guy Bailey's *Language Variety in the South: Perspectives in Black and White. Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 2, 93-110.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1989) Some explanations that strike me as incomplete. Column. Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages, 4, 117-28.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1990a) Transfer and the substrate hypothesis in creolistics. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 12, 1-23.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1990b) Creoles and Universal Grammar. In *Issues in Creole Linguistics. Linguistics 28*. Edited by Pieter Seuren and Salikoko Mufwene. Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 783-807.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1991a) Why grammars are monolithic. In *The Joy of Grammar: A Festschrift for James D. McCawley*. Edited by Gary Larson, Diane Brentari, and Lynn MacLeod. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1991b) Is Gullah decreolizing? A comparison of a speech sample of the 1930's with a speech sample of the 1980's. In *The Emergence of Black English: Texts and Commentaries*. Edited by Guy Bailey, Nathalie Maynor, and Patricia Cukor-Avila. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 213-30.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1991c) Pidgins, creoles, typology, and markedness. In *Development and Structures of Creole Languages: Essays in Honor of Derek Bickerton*. Edited by Francis Byrne & Thom Huebner. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 123-43.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. (1991d) Some reasons why Gullah is not dying yet. *English World-Wide*, 12.

Myers-Scotton, Carol (1989a) *Code-switching with English: Types of switching, types of communities*. World Englishes, 8, 333-46.

Myers-Scotton, Carol (1989b) A look at processing: Code-switching and borrowings. Paper presented at 20th Annual Conference on African Linguistics. Urbana: University of Illinois.

Myers-Scotton, Carol (1990) Building the frame in code-switching. Paper presented at 21st Annual Conference on African Linguistics. Athens, University of Georgia.

Rickford, John R. (1980) Analyzing variation in creole languages. In *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies*. Edited by Albert Valdman and Arnold

Highfield. New York: Academic Press. pp. 165-84.

Rickford, John R. (1987) *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum: History, Texts, & Linguistic Analysis of Guyanese Creole*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rickford, John R. (1990) Number delimitation in Gullah: A response to Mufwene. *American Speech*, 65, 148-63.

Romaine, Suzanne (1982) *Socio-Historical Linguistics: Its status and Methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Romaine, Suzanne (1988) *Pidgin and Creole Languages*. London: Longman.

Schneider, Edgar Werner (1982) On the history of Black English in the USA: Some new evidence. *English World-Wide*, 3, 18-46.

Schneider, Edgar Werner (1983) The diachronic development of the Black English in the USA: Some new evidence. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 16, 55-64.

Schneider, Edgar Werner (to appear) Africanisms in the grammar of Afro-American English. In *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties*. Edited. by Salikoko S. Mufwene.

Sridhar, S.N. and Kamal K. Sridhar (1980) The syntax and psycholinguistics of bilingual code-mixing. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 34, 407-16.

Trudgill, Peter (1986) *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Winford, Donald (1990) The copula variability, accountability and the concept of "polylectal" grammars. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 5, 223-52.

Wolfram, Walter and Ralph Fasold (1974) *The Study of Social Dialects in American English*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.